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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses implementation of the National Standards for Arts Education (1994) and other various education reform initiatives as a means to increase student learning. The school reform initiatives selected for review include: (1) changing the school culture; (2) changing the curriculum; (3) changing instruction; (4) changing assessment; and (5) changing school governance. The paper discusses the implementation of the National Standards for Arts Education as a part of an overall shift in practices and pedagogy for schools involved in education reform. (EH)

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by Sandra C. Dilger

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IMPROVING ARTISTIC AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS AND SCHOOL REFORMS

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Improving American schools and student performance levels are currently urgent tasks for the health of our economy and the future of our society. The central goal of school is student learning, and the purpose of learning is to promote students' cognitive development. Over the past 20 years , there has been significant growth in the number and percent of students with disabilities, whose native language is not English, and who are economically disadvantaged. The changing demographics of our communities and changing workplace demands are driving the need for education reform. Graduates need new skills and competencies in order to succeed in life, to obtain well-paying jobs, and to be productive workers and citizens. The National Education Goals and Standards focus on effective school practices designed to prepare students for the world of work and for postsecondary education.

Fundamental rethinking and redesign of education systems are underway in order to achieve significant improvements in student performance. A National Study of High School Restructuring (Cawelti), conducted in 1993, offers insights into the nature and extent of changes and reveals a pattern of key elements which are beginning to take shape. The seven indicators are (Cawelti, 1995, p.5):

Performance standards
Authentic assessment
Interdisciplinary curriculum
School-based shared decision-making teams
Block scheduling
Business alliances/ Community outreach
Instructional technology

Growing evidence suggests that concentrating on this combination of elements will increase the probability of substantially higher levels of student achievement and help students derive greater meaning from their curricular experiences.

Restructuring schools and systemwide reform are changing the way teaching and learning occurs in public schools today. Teachers' success in accomplishing the serious and difficult tasks of learning new skills and unlearning practices and beliefs about students and instruction that have dominated schools to date will make or break the reform agenda. In response to pressure from parents, politicians and the business community, educators are changing various aspects of their local education systems. Curriculum development, student assessment, professional development, teacher certification standards, parental support and community involvement are essential elements of a redesigned system that will facilitate improved student achievement in art and other subjects.

Art teachers can play a critical role in bringing school improvement initiatives and educational reforms to the classroom. No matter where the ideas for reform are born, changes that make a difference in education must occur at the classroom level. A teacher is potentially the most influential force in a student's educational life.

This presentation will address the implementation of the National Standards and various education reform initiatives as means to increase student learning. The *National Standards for Arts Education* (1994) present statements of what every K-12 American student should know and be able to do in the arts disciplines of dance, music, theatre and the visual arts. They address both content (cumulative skills and knowledge expected at certain benchmark levels) and achievement levels (from beginning to advanced). The consortium that developed the Standards views them as the core of education reform. The Standards provide a crucial foundation for higher student achievement, incorporate cultural diversity, offer connections and integration between subjects, and incorporate technologies that attract and engage students. Implementing the art standards will be discussed later.

SELECTED SCHOOL REFORM INITIATIVES

CHANGING THE SCHOOL CULTURE

The ultimate goal of education reform is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to increase student achievement. In some cases, the first step is to change the entire school culture, beginning with the school **vision, mission and philosophy**. Systemic change in some settings is engrossed in **continuous progress**, **total quality management**, or **school-to-work** philosophies which in turn provide direction, policy and practice. A few sample **guiding principles** are:

ALL students are able to learn.
Active learning is a lifelong process.
The student is a Worker within the system.
Teachers are Lifelong Learners along with their students.
Teachers are Coaches and Facilitators of learning (rather than experts).

Total Quality Management, based on W. Edwards Deming's (1986) theory, emphasizes continuous process improvement, customer satisfaction, long-term thinking, and data-driven decision-making. It focuses on system restructuring to achieve quality. **Continuous Progress** offers an individualized program of learning through the use of a specified scope and sequence which students move through at their own pace or with the assistance of Individualized Education Plans for each student.

In a student-centered system, teachers and principals are accountable for student outcomes. When student expectations are low or when teachers are not prepared and capable of teaching in a specific context, student performance suffers or even fails. Ultimately, student progress depends on the quality and motivation of teachers, resources and support that teachers receive, as well as the effort that students put forth. Nurturing a pedagogical culture of collaboration and constant learning should lie at the heart of reform efforts to improve teacher accountability.

Professional development is becoming site-specific, participant-driven, and grounded in inquiry, reflection and experimentation which is connected to other aspects of school change (Lieberman, 1995). Teachers bond together to form **learning communities** which study, observe, analyze and solve classroom problems collectively. Transforming schools into learning organizations involves thinking through how the content and processes of learning can be redefined in ways that engage both students and teachers in the active pursuit of learning goals. Professional development of this nature breaks the old norms of inservice and preservice models of teacher training. New conceptions of what, when and how teachers learn are created. The model shifts from a top-down, controlled activity or package of activities into a flexible, teacher-driven, capacity-building set of ongoing activities that focus on increasing student artistic and academic achievement.

CHANGING THE CURRICULUM

As a result of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and other reports and studies initiated in the 1980s intended as wake-up calls to American schools, new national and state curriculum standards have become outcomes of education reform efforts. The traditional curriculum is being replaced by clearly delineated standards to be expected of **all** students. National and state art education goals call for **higher standards** and more rigorous curricula with **higher student expectations.** An essential task associated with these new Standards is the **alignment** of the existing curriculum, methods of instruction and assessment into a coherent, unified program of studies and professional practices. We need to build art curricula that are **future-oriented, interdisciplinary, multicultural** and devoted to helping students succeed at work and in school.

One reform initiative is the **integrated curriculum** which reorganizes the curriculum around Big Ideas, concepts, processes or **themes** in order to engage students in learning that is more reflective of **real world contexts**. In some schools the integration is within the four arts disciplines, across subject areas, or of academic and vocational courses via **applied learning**.

The concept of a **competency-based curriculum** emerged from an emphasis on goal-orientation and individualization. Learning goals are made explicit by and for the learner. The individual then can pursue learning activities and can develop performance skills, proficiencies or competencies in the process. Precise learning objectives must be known from the very beginning to the learner and teacher alike. When this approach is coupled with an appropriate management and delivery system, the accountability principle can be applied to all aspects of the instructional program.

CHANGING INSTRUCTION

Instruction includes experiences, supporting materials, tools and people that facilitate learning in the physical environment. Key to student learning is changing the way art teachers work with students in their daily practice. Improvement in academic achievement results from matching instructional techniques with **students' learning profiles**.

Teaching methods have been targeted for analysis of level of effectiveness when school data reveal high failure rates, dropout rates, incidences of suspension, expulsion, violence; and low graduation rates or school morale. The vision of practice that underlies the nation's education reform agenda requires most teachers to rethink their own practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and to teach in ways they have never taught before. Professional development in art education today needs to provide occasions for teachers to **reflect critically on their practice** and to craft new knowledge, skills and beliefs about content, pedagogy and art learners (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995).

Among the ways to change instruction are the **multiple intelligences, multiple talents, or multiple learning styles** approaches which recognize a variety of student aptitudes, preferences and abilities that are then supported and encouraged through a diversified approach to instruction. Art students in one class may be learning the same content; however the learning activities, sequence and modalities may vary greatly. There is no "one-size- fits-all" delivery system whereby every student is on the same page at the same time following the teacher's lead. Teaching is **individualized** to suit the individual student's needs, strengths and weaknesses.

In **inclusive education** settings, all aspects of education are re-considered to ensure enhanced understanding and appreciation for diversity, particularly of individuals with disabilities and/or from culturally diverse backgrounds. Bilingual students and exceptional education students might be mainstreamed into the art class, for example. When teacher aides are not provided in inclusion settings, specialized teacher training may be necessary to fill gaps in a teacher's ability to effectively work with a child with special needs.

Cooperative learning is another instructional strategy practiced in art classes. Students must learn how to work collaboratively in teams if they are going to be prepared to join today's workforce. Learning tasks are reorganized to enable students to work cooperatively in small and large groups and to achieve mutually desired goals within a more interdependent environment. Skills and competencies of working together as a team are reinforced as art students are required to depend on each other yet be individually accountable for their own progress. There are multiple ways to structure cooperative learning groups for specific art classes and lessons.

Cross-age or multi-age grouped classrooms are being used to combine student grade levels in a single classroom to provide a broad range of abilities, to enhance social interactions, and to build in-school "families" which may stay together over a span of time (sometimes throughout a child's attendance at one school). **Continuous placement with the same teacher** allows the student to stay with one or one group of teachers (where **team teaching** is practiced) for a period of several years in order to achieve increased **continuity of caring** and more efficient instruction and individualization.

Mastery learning is a teaching method that supports a continuous cycle of instruction, assessment of student progress, reteaching with alternative strategies or extensions for those with early mastery, and evaluation until achievement is demonstrated. Effective **remediation** strategies are essential to art student success.

In some schools with gifted students, a **"fast track" program** is instituted. Students may apply to participate in a special program which features **accelerated learning**. Selection is based on **demonstrated performance** and qualities such as independence, motivation and integrity. Learning is largely **self-directed** and participants are expected to achieve 100% of the benchmarks for that subject at the "A" level. A student continues working on a unit of study until he/she achieves "grade A" work.

Various ways to organize the school day and year impact instruction. **Year round education, intercessions,** and **block scheduling** are examples. In block scheduling, classes run for longer spans of time (what formerly might have been two or three class periods). It enables students to spend more time learning and less time with changing classes and other interruptions. In addition, block scheduling allows more time for field trips, extended class discussions, cooperative learning , hands-on labs, and dual credit courses which are team taught. Instruction is forced to shift from traditional lectures and 50 minute "chunks" of "covering" textbook material to opportunities for students and teachers to serve as **peer coaches** and to facilitate each other's learning. Instruction can be delivered in a four-day school week with the fifth day utilized for extended learning time for **individualized learning, independent study, apprentice placement, internships and externships, and student-teacher-parent conferences**. **Community-based experiences** and **Service Learning** allow for instruction beyond the classroom walls. Local cultural resources can be capitalized on outside in the surrounding community. Learning is off-campus and workplace-based. **Job shadowing** and other **career exploration options** are incorporated.

CHANGING ASSESSMENT

Assessment instruments are intended to show that learning has occurred. Preferably assessment is authentic, relevant, meaningful, and based on each student's learning style. Learning outcomes and assessment criteria should be developed hand-in-hand with curriculum and instruction. Art teachers need to develop critical habits that allow them to assess student learning **while they are engaged in the lesson**. If we indeed believe that

ALL students can learn through meaningful and challenging work, then we need to change our forms of assessment.

Student, teacher and program assessment methods are undergoing change within various reform initiatives. Most notably has been the movement toward **authentic assessments** which are **performance-based**, connected to **real world contexts** and frequently **embedded within instruction** itself. Performance assessments require the teacher to evaluate actual student behaviors during a simulated or real-life problem solving situation. For example, art students may be asked to design and build a miniature art gallery and prepare notes for the museum docents on each of the artworks in the collection or exhibition. The art teacher or the entire class could create the scoring rubric to be used in assessing each of the mini-galleries. Student achievement is evaluated using student performances or products that demonstrate understanding of a concept or mastery of a skill. Performance assessments direct the student to apply higher order thinking skills to the task rather than simply focus on recall of information and skills. Ratings of performance can include everything from formal scales and checklists to letter grades and anecdotal records of observations in class.

Authentic assessment uses **multiple indicators** and sources of evidence taken over time rather than a one-time, one-format method of judging achievement. **Portfolios and scoring rubrics** are typical features. Student and/or teacher portfolios may contain examples of **"works in progress"** or **best final products** from an entire year. When deciding which items to include, one considers them as artifacts that best represent the diverse abilities, interests, cultures, and work of that class. Portfolios may include an array of items including art projects, written assignments, standardized or teacher-made tests, reading lists, performance notes, journal entries, textbook assignments, reports, research findings, sketches in daily logs, critiques of art shows or individual works of art, or multimedia presentations on artists or art movements. Items can be actual items or collections stored as multimedia on computer disks representing a span of time like a cumulative folder.

Portfolio assessment tends to be qualitative, process-oriented, open-ended, long-term, and unlimited in its application to real-life situations. Most importantly, it nurtures the **developmental stages** of students and allows for individual differences in their growth patterns. It emphasizes critical and creative thinking on the part of the student because portfolio assessment is dependent on self-discovery, self-motivation and self-initiating behaviors, which can be powerful stimuli for learning.

Traditional report cards are being replaced in some schools with student resumes and learner profiles. **Performance-based diplomas** are used in some school systems whereby graduation depends on **proficiency** and successful **demonstration** of specified competencies rather than on time spent in school and course credits accrued.

Teachers have several options when it comes to choosing assessment methods. Each method has advantages and disadvantages in particular situations. Based on the mode of response the student makes, there are four broad categories of assessments for teachers to use:

1. Paper and pencil
2. Performance-based or behavior-based (direct observation)
3. Product- or portfolio-based
4. Interview-based

A large number of variations or combinations of these four options are possible.

CHANGING SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Schools that are organized in a traditional manner have difficulty responding to the educational needs of their students as they prepare for the 21st century. Evaluation of the current status of student performance and the school's overall performance are needed annually. Consideration should be given to organizational components such as Time, Space, Resources, Personnel, and Management Issues (policy, legal, financial, and so on).

Among the most common reform initiatives related to school governance is **site-based management.** Key decisions are made at the local level with more of an emphasis on the **empowerment** of teachers and those who are responsible for day-to-day implementation of comprehensive school improvement plans. **Local control** or grassroots leadership is at the core of site-based management. Those who are closest to the students should decide which course of action to take with greatest potential to result in higher student achievement. **Flexibility** needs to be an accepted practice in areas of school improvement such as curriculum development, instructional strategies, assessment methods, professional development, use of technology, funding and budget plans. School advisory groups need flexibility to make decisions that will meet the needs of the diverse population they serve. The reform agenda pertaining to governance issues revolves around the ability to take advantage of **waivers** from various local, state and federal rules and regulations which restrict innovations and risk taking and might impede student learning.

For local control to succeed, it is imperative that **parent, family or community involvement** be an integral component of improving student performance. Research studies show that the more involved a student's parents are, the more likely the student will perform better in school.

School choice is an area of education reform that encourages academic risk taking and the active participation of shareholders, especially parents and children, in selecting the best learning environment for individual students. Examples range from charter schools , art magnet programs, and specialized academies to school-within-schools and year round models. **Flexible school calendar** is an option where students and their families are given a choice of scheduling for the school year which may range from traditional August to

June programs to modified schedules with staggered tracks of attendance or various "shifts" running throughout the day, evening, weekends, and summers.

SUMMARY

The American teaching landscape is full of models and innovations proposed as means to improve teaching and learning. Because we educators seem to be losing precious ground in overall student achievement, it becomes more and more imperative and challenging **how to make a real difference in student performance**. The education reform initiatives briefly introduced here are but a quick glance at a complex array of ways to change the fundamental school culture; operation of the school system; and content, delivery and assessment of the curriculum. Each single topic could be investigated in depth for its potential contributions to improving artistic and/or academic achievement levels.

Art teachers need to be aware of the multitude of reform initiatives that are being implemented in public schools throughout the nation. Regardless of the grade level, rural/urban/suburban setting, special grants or resources provided, technological requirements, philosophy of the local school board, community special interest groups, amount of school budget, size of classes, or any other factors, art teachers must find out what is happening in neighboring schools, districts, and states. It is likely just a matter of time before similar initiatives will be adopted by the decisionmakers in your school. If you are well informed and know colleagues already implementing a particular program or practice, you can be a leader in your school who is on the fasttrack to implementation. A prime example of a rapidly growing trend in education is the movement at state and national levels to develop and implement standards for student performance such as the National Standards for Arts Education.

IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR ARTS EDUCATION

The National Standards for Arts Education are part of an overall shift in practices and pedagogy for schools involved in education reform. Drafted by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations in 1992 with extensive input from grassroots practitioners and community focus groups, the Standards underwent an extended consensus-building process. Finalized in 1994, the degree of adoption and institutionalization of the Standards varies widely from school to school and teacher to teacher. Support and assistance from school board members, superintendents, district administrators and building principals are essential in order to build enough momentum to make a real difference in the quality of art teaching and learning in public schools. The entire school community needs to participate and actively support the alignment of the art curriculum with the Standards and staff development activities which cover the additional knowledge and skills necessary for effective implementation of the Standards in all schools.

Because they are voluntary , the art standards must be adapted to each school's own curriculum, unique student needs, and available resources. They should be designed to fit the individuality of the particular student population and the current local circumstances. Standards are key to building coherence in a school system that is seeking fundamental change.

Some art educators feel threatened by standards and other reform initiatives. This is an unfortunate situation because the arts can serve as boundary breakers and offer a means to overcoming the traditional "turf wars" where veteran teachers fight to preserve their territorial subject area rights. Art educators are in a unique position to assume leadership in American education if they choose to do so. However, "for the arts to display their powers, they must be embedded and valued in the curriculum" (Dobbs, 1996, xv).

If the visual arts expect to be valued by the school community at large, they need to be comprehensive, cross-disciplinary, and exemplary of standards for educational excellence. The National Standards provide a vision of competence, effectiveness, and equity. They represent the acquisition of cultural literacy, intuition, reasoning, and imagination through unique forms of personal expression and communication. These traits offer reasons for the visual arts to be valued. The question remains, will art educators take it upon themselves to embed the Standards in their own school curriculum?

In order to implement the Standards, there are a few basic assumptions that are needed to set the stage (Dilger, 1995):

> People (grassroots advocates) know **what** the standards are, **why** they are important, and **publicly support** them.
>
> Shareholders (teachers, students, parents, arts community) hold a **shared vision** of what the desired student outcomes and performance standards are.
>
> The school/district use the standards as a **guide** for setting instructional goals and for raising academic content levels and student achievement.
>
> A group of master art teachers have **aligned the existing curriculum pre K-12** with the new Standards and developed appropriately correlated assessment items.
>
> **Policies, resources and practices** are in place that support the revised art curriculum.

Once there are common beliefs, philosophies, policies, goals and objectives, then educators can develop a plan for **continuous quality improvement**. A **long-range plan** that encompasses multiple areas, methods and opportunities for achievement is needed in order to build capacity at the local level that reaches every single art classroom. Teachers must be willing to acquire additional knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to successfully teach challenging new subject matter and to use emerging new methodologies, forms of assessment and technologies. **New models for art teacher education** are needed for both inservice and preservice programs, especially to incorporate the new standards and other reform initiatives. If we cannot guarantee the public a high performing workforce in our nation's schools, then we will face the threat of privatization as parents withdraw their children to enroll in favor of private school choice. Therefore, it is imperative that school systems can attract, recruit, prepare, assess, support, and reward the highest caliber professional art specialists available.

Once the Standards have been fully implemented in a school and/or school system, it is most important to analyze and evaluate annually the key indicators of progress on the implementation strategies. Such indicators include student performance results, assessment of effectiveness of teacher inservice provided, and feedback from parents and community members (through surveys and interviews). In any event, art educators can count on the constant need for aggressive school-based planning, policymaking and sustained, quality professional development to carry the reform agenda forward. Monitoring student progress in achieving national and state standards and monitoring teacher progress in raising student expectations and achievement levels within any of the reform initiatives are integral parts of public accountability. In order to accomplish increased student performance levels, there must be **higher performing teachers**. Advocacy for the arts and constant program revision/ renewal must be an accepted professional duty of every art teacher if the visual arts are going to survive and thrive in the 21st century. The arts will be stronger for it; the teaching profession will be stronger for it; and our nation will be stronger for it.

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